

Finding craftsmen is challenging



JULIE MORSE

REALTY InSITES

Beautiful homes from bygone centuries grace many of Chicago's suburbs. Their architecture runs the gamut, from stately English manors and grand Victorians, to sturdy Arts-and-Crafts bungalows and Rockwellesque farmhouses.

Harkening back to the 19th and early 20th century, these treasures are each unique — but they do share one common attribute. They require the tender loving care of Old World artisans and repair experts who understand and appreciate their history.

Finding such craftsman can sometimes be a challenge of historic proportion. Mary Kay King of Flossmoor interviewed 10 window companies before choosing Tim Murphy of Evanston's TMC Windows to restore her 1920s Tudor's unusual double-hung windows.

She noted, "Tim respected that I wanted my old windows restored to look as they did when they were new ... not made into new-looking windows. He really cared and understood the history, restoring them by hand."

The job has taken three months and long commutes, but Murphy noted, "The more old windows I restore, the more I appreciate them. The old-growth lumber we find under the layers is a gorgeous treasure and a resource we won't see again."

Rocco DeFilippis of Legacy Custom Homes is a noted restoration expert, having worked on some of the North Shore's most famous mansions. A current project is the total restoration of the A.G. Becker estate in Highland Park, by

legendary architect Howard Van Doren Shaw.

"It's hard to find true Old-World artisans these days," said DeFilippis. "My father's a life-long mason, and I can still consult with him and his peers. But, I've also discovered a few younger master craftsmen who care as deeply — people like Chris Brugioni at Lake Forest Masonry or Matt Wilkinson at Cedar Roofing, both working on houses with me now.

"Putting together a team that cares about a historic house in its entirety is key to restoration."

Sometimes what comes with a historic home is also treasure found, according to Heather Becker, CEO of the Chicago Conservation Center. For example, some vintage wallpapers can be valuable art, worthy of preservation, even if stained or frayed. The same goes for light fixtures, tiles, or paintings and furnishings passed down through generations of owners.

"Always enlist a conservation expert before assuming something special is a loss," said Becker. "Surprises often result."

The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois offers a wealth of helpful information for homeowners, including the Illinois Restoration Resources directory at www.landmarks.org. The list includes dozens of preservation specialists and repair experts by field — all recommended by a committee of architects and related professionals, not through paid advertising.

Another local trade resource is your Realtor. Midge Powell of Winnetka's Jean Wright Real Estate has represented many historic homes, including her current listing of a restored 1930s Edwin Hill Clark house on Winnetka's Woodley Road. Powell said, "I've learned firsthand who is tried and true for such homes — and who isn't."

Julie Morse is a Realtor in Illinois and Wisconsin.